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SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL

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TAGS: PHUM KDEM YM HUMAN RIGHTS DEMOCRATIC REFORM

SUBJECT: U.S. RECORD 2003-04: SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN YEMEN

REF: A. 03 SANAA 1101

1B. 03 SECSTATE 333935

11. (u) Paragraph 2 contains Post's input for the 2003-04 edition of "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: the U.S. Record" per reftel b. Because last year's report on Yemen contained programs that were ongoing throughout 2003-04 (ref a), Post's input consists of updated language on ongoing programs and additional language on new programs. Submission will also be sent to DRL via e-mail as a tracked changes document.

12. (u) Begin Text:

Yemen

Although events in 2003 reflect improvement in its human rights record, Yemen has a history of problems in both the political and social sphere, including citizens' limited ability to change the government, a weak judiciary, human rights abuses, and laws limiting freedom of expression. The 2003-2004 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Yemen addresses the need for the Government to continue to strengthen its human rights record, continue to enact social reforms, improve problems within the judiciary, and further the process of democratic development. The United States continued several long-term projects addressing these issues, including programs aimed at strengthening Yemen's political parties, improving election administration, increasing voter participation, fostering civil society and improving the country's human rights record.

The Defense Department Counter-Terrorism Fellowship funds a training program in the United States for Yemeni military officers, one aim of which is to convey the importance of respecting human rights. This program is highly successful in Yemen and is ongoing.

Yemen continued a long-term program of judicial reform, in an attempt to counter the numerous problems within the judiciary. Yemen's Minister of Justice and other jurists participated actively in the Middle East Partnership Initiative's Arab Judicial Forum. The courts are only nominally independent and have been plagued by corruption, executive branch interference, and the failure of authorities to enforce rulings.

In addition to political reforms, the United States has been urging the Government of Yemen to enact social reforms and encourage respect for human rights. The United States engages frequently with the Government's Ministry of Human Rights to improve the Government's ability and willingness to redress specific human rights abuses. The Embassy continued to support 17 separate NGO projects in 2003. Two programs to provide training and capacity building to NGOs targeted rural areas where civil society remains nascent. Another project raised awareness of the struggles and rights of disabled children in public schools to combat discrimination. Several projects aimed to improve women's rights. Yemeni women have traditionally been politically and socially marginalized, with limited political representation in parliament or local councils despite high voter participation, restricted access to healthcare and education, as well as widespread reports of domestic abuse, and some instances of female genital mutilation. Under a USDA program, the Embassy established a project to build and furnish new primary schools for girls in isolated rural areas in order to give girls access to modern education and to facilitate their inclusion within society. A \$2 million MEPI-funded program aims to address the 67% illiteracy rate among women and girls.

USAID reopened its offices in Yemen in 2003. USAID is promoting a social/economic development program to address some fundamental human issues facing the Government of Yemen and its people, including: health; basic education and literacy; food security and employment in a predominantly agricultural society; and strengthening democratic institutions.

In 2003, International Visitor Programs brought NGO activists, government officials and other leaders to the United States to gain skills and knowledge in such areas as youth leadership, women's leadership in civil society and the

public and private sector and community service and NGOs.

A multi-year Department of Labor-supported program administered through the International Labor Organization continued combating the problem of street child labor in 2003.

Although the citizens of Yemen still have limited ability to change their Government, significant strides have been made to address problems plaguing the electoral system, including poorly-organized voter registration resulting in disenfranchisement, inadequate election day administration and fraud prevention, and inequitable political party participation. The United States funded programs by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) to strengthen Yemen's multi-party system. They worked directly with political activists to improve future elections by focusing on increasing women's political participation and representation, improving voter registration, particularly among women, and strengthening election day administration.

NDI continued a U.S.-funded program to improve the ability of local councils to represent the citizens through a better understanding of the law governing local councils. The April 2003 national parliamentary elections were generally considered to have been a significant improvement over previous elections, with good marks for organization, participation and security. For example, women's registration and participation in the election increased by more than 40% to reach more than 75% of eligible women voters participating. The Ambassador, embassy staffers, and election observers from IFES, NDI, the European Union and the UN were present at polling places throughout the country to observe the elections.

In 2004, the Embassy will increase programming designed to strengthen democratic institutions, decentralize authority and resource management, and expand opportunities for civil society in decision-making.

Regionally, the U.S. supported the al-Khalij Forum For Democratic Political Action, held in Sanaa in October 2003. It was the third such forum in the region, which brought together democratic activists from the Gulf and Iraq to improve their advocacy skills in fostering political reform in the region.

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